

REVISTA UNICA, A WEEKEND SUPPLEMENT, IS A BIG HIT WITH A NOVEL GRAPHIC AND JOURNALISTIC APPROACH

In his song *Heart of Gold*, Neil Young includes a verse that says “I am a miner searching for a heart of gold,” and I have often thought that we journalists often behave as miners in search of “golden concepts.”

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One such concept emerged in May 2008 when INNOVATION’s consultants met in Lisbon to plan the re-launch of the magazine *Unica*, a part of the *Expresso*

weekly newspaper.

Our assignment was as simple as it was complicated: to create something different. The magazine had lost some of its vitality, its identity had become blurred and in the saturated Portuguese market it was important to stand out from the competition.

In keeping with the philosophy and tradition of *Expresso*’s parent group, quality had to be the underpinning of all change, rather than a shift downmarket, and the entire corporate structure lined up to support our efforts, starting with Group President and publisher Francisco Pinto Balsemao, as well as the editor of *Expresso* Henrique Monteiro, and, above all, Mafalda Anjos who had been hired specifically to lead the re-launch.



We translated our search for the “golden concept” into a search for “the best of the best,” and in journalism this can be represented by an outstanding interview, a brilliant feature, an insightful opinion piece, a photographic image, or an entire photo essay. Our goal became to blend the best of the best in all these categories to provide multifaceted coverage of individual stories. Cover stories became “cover subjects” viewed through a variety of journalistic prisms, expanding on a formula successfully developed by *ES*, the





weekend supplement of *La Vanguardia* of Barcelona

We sought to add depth and perspective to the magazine's reporting, in a printed equivalent of widening the movie screen for a Cinemascope view.

We named this approach "fusion journalism." We felt that this conveyed several fundamental messages: newness, and thus modernity and innovation; harmonization of different ingredients, and luxury, as an expression of excellence and the combination of the best of the best.

Marta Botero recalls that "the discussion involving the preparation of the first dummy issue was a marvelous training experience for editors, designers and reporters. But the really significant training took place during the planning sessions for future issues, where a new approach brought together the newsroom, the photo department, and the designers to make sure that all disciplines were brought to bear on the stories."

One example that may illustrate and explain this approach was the choice of a theme drawn against the likelihood of Barack Obama's election to the Presidency of the United States. The theme was blackness, in all of its ramifications.

It covered a wide range of concepts related to blackness. From fashion (the use of black in clothing), to science (black holes), black literature, society (equality, inequality and even the concept of the black sheep), sports (records of black athletes) humor, and dozens of other aspects of blackness, allowing for a very broad coverage of a single theme. And

each aspect would be covered in a wide range of disciplines – interviews, pictures, opinion columns, etc.

"Six months after the re-launch," says Juan Antonio Giner, "Revista Unica has become a driving force for sales of *Expresso*, averaging 130 pages per issue and increasing numbers of ad pages, reflecting reader and advertiser interest in a publication that is now read, saved and collected."

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THE EDITOR SPEAKS

Mafalda Anjos, editor, *Revista Unica, Expresso*, Lisbon, Portugal.

"I feel that this new concept of 'fusion journalism' has pushed the magazine and the entire team one level up. At first, people were very afraid of the big change this would imply for them and their working habits. Previously, the magazine was a summary of what the journalists wanted to write at any given moment, in my view with little consideration about the reader's interests or preferences. And they often competed with another section of *Expresso*, *Primeiro Caderno*, instead of complementing it.

But this big change could only succeed with everyone's support and involvement. It was critical that everyone be on board, and understand that this was the way to give the magazine its own unique place inside *Expresso* and the media in general.

We started doing brainstorming meetings to think about concepts and themes, with only one simple rule in mind: every crazy idea was worth considering. Now, the meetings are incredibly fun and productive, we work hard, but with our hearts! And I'm sure that if we work with passion, the readers notice. And things turned out just as our poet Fernando Pessoa said about Coca Cola back in 1927: '*Primeiro estranha-se, depois entranha-se!*' (At first it's strange, afterwards it's a wonderful vice).

I think this experience pushed our people to their limits. It awaked some reporters who had little motivation and implanted a big sense of team responsibility.

We plan two months in advance, and this is the only way to do it (at least with this number of people). The most difficult challenge is to plan and work in advance, without losing the perspective of what's in the news and readers' minds. We must plan, but have the ability and imagination to change and adapt every single issue of the magazine. We cannot be handcuffed by planning.

If you ask me if it's difficult for an editor to work with this model, my answer is yes. I feel we have extra work in thinking, discussing, planning. But if you ask me if I would change this model for anything else, my answer is absolutely not! Let's hope the readers feel the same. And for the comments we had so far, it seems they do.